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THE PERIL OF PRIVATE MUNITION PLANTS

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BY

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THE PERIL OF PRIVATE MUNITION PLANTS.

Address at World's Peace Conference, The Hague, 1913, by Mr. G. H. Perris.

We have this year, for the first time, I think, in the history of the peace movement, an analysis, something like a scientific analysis, of the methods by which war material is supplied to three of the greatest countries in the world. In the case of the German Empire, Dr. Liebknecht has placed before the Reichstag the results of his inquiries. In the case of France, M. Delaisi has embodied the results of his inquiry in a little pamphlet, to be obtained upstairs. I have myself made a similar inquiry so far as concerns the great manufacturers of armaments for the British Empire. It is, therefore, not simply as regards the wickedness of militarism and the preparations for war in Germany that this question rises. Liebknecht's revelations in Germany have attracted peculiar attention; but what the investigations that have been made in England and France prove is that this disease is substantially the same in all the great countries of the world.

These inquiries give somewhat surprising results, or at least surprising to those who are already economic students. I shall very rapidly summarize for you the results of these inquiries. I suppose that it is natural for people who do not know the international peace movement, and who say that pacifists are sentimentalists, to say also that armaments are, as it were, a national fire engine—they are as necessary for the extinction of international animosity as are the fire engines in our cities for the extinction of fires. These people sincerely believe that the great names of Krupp und Schneider and Armstrong and others are properly honored, each in his own country. So in Germany the Kaiser decorated Krupp, visits his house, and shows signs of satisfaction in standing beside a member of that firm, and so we hear, in regard to the war in the Balkans, of "a contest between Germany and France" as to whether the cannons supplied to the combatants came from Krupp's or Schneider's; which is as if people competed for the honor of having served out poisons for the purpose of murder. And so in England Vickers, Maxim, and others are honorable corporations in the eyes of the public; and if there is a new battleship, it can not go into battle without having been christened by some lady of title with a bottle of champagne. It is a matter of honor thus to dedicate a means of human slaughter. It is supposed that the armaments are necessary for the peace of the world, and it is supposed that the makers of them are excellent citizens; and so it is also supposed that these traders can not be dangerous, because they are under the control of the respective Governments giving them their orders.

The students of this nefarious trade—and it is nefarious, ladies and gentlemen [applause]—know that the reality behind the appearance is somewhat different. First, there is revealed the immense

wealth of the trade in armaments. Seven of the many companies in Great Britain which sell armaments to the British Government and to other Governments have a total capital of £30,000,000—750,000,000 francs—seven of them only, and there are scores of them. Two of these only, Vickers and Armstrong, this year distributed £1,500,000 in profits. I mention these facts to illustrate the wealth of the armaments trade.

THE WAR TRADERS' TRUST.

And we find that these firms, instead of being competitive business, are combined, both within each country and internationally. The plea that one company competes with another and makes honest sales to its Government is pure pretense. This combination is extending more and more into the international field. It is far from being complete. The whole business of armaments has not become cosmopolitanized, but it has reached a considerable degree toward that. It is very probable that it will be some time before great armaments makers of the three great entities—the groups of nations represented by the German Empire, the French Republic, and the British Empire—cease to compete with each other. They do undoubtedly compete to a certain extent. But they already meet each other at many points.

You may remember the case of the Deutsche Munitions- und Waffen-Fabrik, cited by Dr. Liebknecht in the Reichstag. This was the case of a German company holding a considerable share in French companies and exerting a provocative influence in the Parisian press, in order that competition and jealousy as to orders for armaments may be kept alive. In England we have a combination of the British and German Nobel companies—an Anglo-German dynamite alliance! We had up to recently the Harvey United Steel Company, a combination of British, American, French, and German capitalists. There are other such cases. There is no difficulty whatever, when profits are at the end of the road, for a Frenchman and a German to walk together [laughter]; no more difficulty than for a Frenchman and an Englishman to walk together. They are patriots both. [Laughter.] I think the worst aspect, perhaps, of the operations of Krupp, Schneider, and Armstrong is their effort to exploit those minor nations of the world, some of which were described by an English poet, Mr. Kipling, as "half devil and half child."

I will take the case of Messrs. Armstrong, Whitworth & Co., as a sample of the patriotism of these traders firm. The chairman is one Sir Andrew Noble, and I beg you to note the impartiality of his patriotism. He is a baronet and a knight commander of the Bath of Great Britain, a member of the Order of Jesus Christ of Portugal, and a knight of the Order of Charles the Third of Spain. He is also a first class of the Sacred Treasure of Japan, a grand cross of the Crown of Italy, and is decorated with Turkish and Chilean and Brazilian honors. His patriotism is truly the larger patriotism. [Laughter.] But, unlike our patriotism, it has a strict cash basis. [Applause.] Messrs. Armstrong will build warships for any country in the world; they are quite impartial. They are constantly sending armor plate to all parts of the world, no matter what is the

cause of dispute. You will observe the double influence of these sales, for if they sell a battleship to a foreign country it becomes an argument for increasing the British fleet in turn, and that means a new increase of orders for Armstrong, Whitworth & Co. Some of you have no doubt looked down, as I have, upon the chimneys of the Pozzuoli-Armstrong Co. which pollute the Bay of Naples. Here Great Britain helps to maintain the fighting force of Germany's ally. There is also the Ansaldo-Armstrong Co., of Genoa. These companies not only build for Italy but also for Turkey. [Laughter.] I do not know whether the warships of those two countries actually came in contact in the Tripolitan War, but if they did they may both have been impartially built by Armstrong-Whitworth companies. You also remember the curious triangular puzzle lying over the destinies of the Far East in the relations of Russia, Japan, and China. The Armstrong Co. has its own ordnance and armor-plate works in Japan. It is always seeking orders for armaments in China. At the same time, in conjunction with two other British firms, Maxims and John Brown & Co., and also in connection with Blohm & Voss, of Hamburg, and Messrs. Schneider, this triple alliance is building up a new fleet for Russia, at the cost of the famine-striken peasantry. The Armstrong firm is at the present moment part owner of the Hispania Naval Construction Works at Ferrol. Another British syndicate is building a new fleet for Portugal, which is always trembling on the brink of bankruptcy. Heaven forbid that Spain and Portugal should quarrel; but what are these fleets for but to quarrel with? Whatever follows, the money will go into the pockets of these salesmen. The Armstrong, Vickers, and Brown firms are now building up great ordnance shipbuilding works in Canada for the exploitation of the innocent patriotism of the people of that colony. What country is the enemy of Canada? On one side is the American Nation—"Cousin Jonathan" as we call him. Across the ocean lies the rising Empire of Japan, which is England's ally.

What these events mean is that, over those frontiers that base-minded politicians have built—that history has built, of course, finally—there is carried on an **industry which has no frontiers whatever to its greed**, no limits to its fierce and pitiless exploitation of the weakness and folly of human nature. It can not be denied, I think, that the sole interest of these firms consists in embroiling one nation with another. They preach nationalism upon a national platform, and they practice nationalism, but it is a nationalism of a chameleon character, which changes its color with every order that some commercial traveler brings home to them. Some of you must wonder from time to time where the hill tribesmen of India, where the slave traders of the Persian Gulf, where the Somalis, where the revolutionists of the South American States, where all these get their rifles and munitions of war. The fact is there is no conscience whatever in the trade of death. [Applause.] These great companies will sell their deadly weapons to anyone. Those regulations which prevent evil-minded persons buying a revolver at a shop without showing a good license do not apply to cases like these. Such firms sell their weapons on some lonely frontier, and then we wonder there is a "little" war.

The most pitiful fact is the comparative helplessness of the governments concerned. I think we may say the British Government is as pure as any in the world, and not lacking, in the usual political concerns, in strength. But I am satisfied the British Government is nearly helpless before the array of interests it has to face whenever these merchants of war choose to go into the field of political agitation. In the last few years we have had one serious instance. **In 1909 there was an Anglo-German naval crisis, provoked and engineered largely, not simply by these firms in general, but by one particular man whose company had been disappointed of getting Government orders.** So strong an agitation had he created that he was at last admitted to a meeting of the British Cabinet Council in Downing Street; and the Government of Mr. Asquith accepted the false information Mr. Mulliner gave as to the "acceleration" of naval preparations at Krupp's works in Germany.

I hope no one here will allow his eyes to be blinded to the vital aspects of the subject by the comparatively unimportant story of the corruption in Berlin. Like the national espionage stories, these petty sensations keep our minds off the main thing. **The corruption of the war trade does not lie in petty bribery, but in the vast offer of directors' fees and opportunities for profit and employment.** The governing class of England is, to a large extent, saturated with the profits of the trade in armaments. Therefore, with all possible respect to that phrase which Mr. Norman Angell has made popular, "War does not pay," I put to you another proposition as important, which is that war **does pay.** War pays very well; and there would be no war if it did not pay. It pays the few at the cost of the many.

Some of you will remember the famous picture of the Retreat From Moscow. I have sometimes thought of another picture very much like that, in which, instead of those defeated legions struggling through the snow, with Napoleon at their head, I saw an army of the laborers of the world, beaten for the moment in their eternal struggle for some measure of justice, for some share in the fruits they have raised from the earth. I seemed to walk through these masses of despairing men as they struggled over the field of battle which is their daily life; and I came to the rear, and I saw, as in the picture, the phantom figures of the Cossacks, and, with them, those ghoulish figures that follow behind the line of every retreating army to steal from the dead and dying. I thought I came up to those figures, and to my astonishment I found they were not the jackals of whom the novelists and the historian tell us; they were not common thieves; but one I saw was a respectable English gentleman; he was decorated with the Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath, and he was decorated, if you please, with the Order of Jesus Christ of Portugal. [Applause.]

That is a scandal, a world scandal, which should be made to ring through the world, and which I hope will so ring before another International Peace Congress is held. You have in these three cases definite facts to go upon. But, friends, our business in this congress is not denunciation. The business of the International Peace Congress and the international peace movement is a rescue business—a business of life saving. Let us keep our eyes upon the positive

aspect of this question—our duty to rescue governments from what is put upon them by this corrupt and debasing trade, our duty to rescue some of our fellow men from grinding toil and disease, brought upon them by the burdens they have to carry. I do not envy these men their decorations and rewards. That man is thrice accursed who carries his neighbor's death upon his back, who thrives upon the miseries of his fellows, and knows that every step he takes forward is at the cost of some of the poor, the helpless, and even the women and the children. I hope you will help me here, that we shall help others outside, to make this a real campaign of provocative opinion—so provocative that it will not only break the false reputation for national honor of these firms, but break the superstition which crystallizes around the trade. Let us break the superstition that the weapons of the soldier are defenses of national honor and influence. [Applause.] If we do that it will be impossible for Armstrongs to build up a fleet in Italy to beat a fleet they have set up in Spain; impossible for Japan to defeat Russia with both fleets built by the same firm. Superstition is the great enemy of the peace movement. When we have destroyed this superstition we shall see men stand up for the first time free and equal, able to share in peace the fruits of their industry. [Applause.]

Cette résolution est adopté à l'unanimité.



